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ABSTRACT

This brief identifies practices that include students with disabilities in large-scale assessments as required by the reauthorized and amended 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. It notes relevant research by the National Center on Educational Outcomes and summarizes major findings of studies funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs concerning appropriate accommodations, alternate assessments, and reporting of results. In the area of appropriate accommodations, the paper finds great variations across disability groups and from district to district and state to state. Efforts to embed curriculum-based measurement into the process, develop a classification of accommodations, and create standardized methods for determining accommodation validity are summarized. Addressing alternate assessments, the paper notes efforts in Kentucky to use portfolio assessments and in Maryland to measure outcomes that are life-skills oriented. Concerning the reporting of results, the paper describes an effort in Long Beach, California, to tie large-scale assessments to school effectiveness policies and include all special education students. (DB)

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The 1997 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act requires that students with disabilities participate in large-scale assessments and that a statement of individual modifications in the administration of the assessments be included in the student's IEP. In response, most districts and states are in the early stages of developing and implementing assessment models that include *all* students. A large number are already using testing accommodations and a few are developing alternate assessments. But for the majority of state and local district practitioners, this new mandate is raising questions and causing concerns.

> ***Including students with disabilities in the development and implementation of assessments is a vital step toward providing them access to the general curriculum and to challenging learning standards.***
>
> *Judy Heumann, Assistant Secretary*
> *U.S. Department of Education*

Research and dissemination efforts sponsored by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) are providing information to address these questions. One information source is the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) whose major research focus has been on how to increase participation of students with disabilities in large-scale assessments.

NCEO maintains a Web site (http://www.coled.umn.edu/NCEO) and publishes various reports on assessment topics including

- Self-Study Guide for the Development of Statewide Assessments That Include Students with Disabilities.
- Issues and Considerations in Alternate Assessments.
- Increasing the Participation of Students with Disabilities in State and District Assessments.
- Reporting Educational Results for Students with Disabilities.

Additional OSEP-funded studies address determining appropriate accommodations, alternate assessments, and reporting results.

Appropriate Accommodations

Many states allow for special testing conditions and accommodations, but proper use of accommodations has become a major concern. Plus, accommodation policies vary from district to district and state to state making it almost impossible to compare student performance. There is also great variation in the use of accommodations across disability groups. Accommodations for students with physical or sensory disabilities are routinely approved, which is not always the case for students with cognitive or behavioral difficulties. The following represent a few of the researchers currently working to standardize accommodations' use and fairness:

- Gerald Tindal, a University of Oregon professor, believes that testing accommodations should take into account the learner's needs, the task demands, and the purpose of the accommodation. He stresses the need to have in place a sound decision-making process such as curriculum-based measurement (CBM). He has been working with practitioners in Oregon to embed CBM in the IEP process and relate a student's performance as measured by CBM to that attained on large-scale assessments. A pilot group of teachers has been working to consider standards in math and reading for their students, identify benchmarks, determine the appropriate assessments and accommodations, and write these into the IEP. Thus, the IEPs are written to reflect the student's level of mastery.
- Stephen Elliott of the University of Wisconsin-Madison developed the Assessment Accommodations Checklist (AAC), which contains 74 accommodations organized into eight domains (e.g., motivation, scheduling, direc-

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tions, adaptive technology). Educators can use the AAC to rate the extent to which they think that a particular accommodation will help the student.

- Lynn Fuchs, Professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, has funding from OSEP to create standardized methods for determining which accommodations are valid for which students. The aim is to reduce the variability of accommodations across districts and states. To do this, she is developing, validating, and codifying the Dynamic Assessment Tool for Accommodations (DATA).

Alternate Assessments

While still in their infancy, alternate assessments offer promise for ensuring that all students are included fully in the accountability process.

> ***Including all students in district-wide and statewide testing has the potential to improve teaching.***
>
> *Kathy Morris, Staff Development Specialist, Beaumont, TX*

Kentucky's Alternative Portfolio Assessment (KAPA), for example, allows accommodations for students with disabilities that are consistent with the appropriate delivery of instruction for that individual. Examples of learning outcomes include the abilities to communicate effectively, use quantitative or numerical concepts in real-life problems, and effectively use interpersonal skills.

Maryland, a state that has one of the highest participation rates in its statewide assessment system, has recently piloted its alternate assessment. The Independence Mastery Assessment Program measures outcomes that are life-skills oriented.

Reporting Results

Reporting accurate information on students with disabilities ensures that they are represented in the accountability system. Although there is great variability in both state and local reporting practices, school districts are seeking ways to report the progress of all students in meaningful ways.

The Long Beach, California, Unified School District offers one example of an innovative approach to the reporting issue. With consultation from staff at NCEO, Long Beach educators set out to tie large-scale assessments directly to school effectiveness policies. They also decided to include all of their 5,000 special education students in the assessments.

The district generates two separate assessment reports: one for everyone taking the standard assessment and a separate one for the approximately 300 students with severe disabilities who participate in the district's alternate assessment. Schools are held accountable for both sets of scores. Information is also kept regarding accommodations used by students.

Summary

The 1997 Reauthorization of IDEA stresses the importance of including students with disabilities in all educational reform activities. Special education researchers and practitioners are pioneering efforts to prepare these students to take part in and succeed in large-scale assessments, thus ensuring that the mandate is implemented in the best interests of the students and their families.

For a fuller look at the research discussed in this digest, the reader is referred to *Research Connections*, Spring 1998, published by the ERIC/OSEP Special Project (see front for contact information).

Resources

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